

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee

February 28, 2023

DMHAS BUDGET HEARING

SUBJECT MATTER: Governor's Proposed FY 24-25 Budget for Health Agencies

H.B. No. 6659 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2025 AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

Dyana Hagen, BSW

Good morning Senators and Representatives of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Dyana Hagen, and I am a social workers and registered voter in Tolland, CT.

I am testifying regarding H.B. No.6659 for the DMHAS Appropriations budget.

I watch the news every morning and every night. I listen to NPR and try to remain as objective as I possibly can with what I hear. With every heartbreaking event on nightly news, there's always a non-profit social worker involved to glue back the pieces that have been broken. They are involved in police crisis units, first responder traumas, school behavioral health, hospitals, basic needs resources and more.

As a social worker who has been on the front lines in the past few years, I've seen the need for social supports expand faster than the resources to provide them. I've seen people coming in for housing services because they have nowhere to go. It's so disheartening when we have nothing to offer them except the phone to call to 211 to see if they can get a bed in the nearest homeless shelter. Elderly and vulnerable people don't use computers or have the knowledge on how to use them. It is the non-profits that link them and all other vulnerable and marginalized people to stability. This is the humanity and community that separates America from a third world country.

What has been proposed in the budget does not cover the costs for essential community support services when the governor's budget doesn't include enough funding to help them operate or for fundamental changes to a broken system that overworks human service professionals as a standard of practice. Whatever increases DMHAS received due to COVID are still a set back because we've been underfunded for over a decade. Inflation has created food and housing insecurity to many who never were in need of these supports and don't know how to access them without the help of a non-profit.

The only way we're going to get this state ahead is by providing health care with wrap around services to help people navigate the system in place and to deal with the traumas that they've experienced. We have not come back from COVID.

We only just survived it, now the real work begins to put the pieces back together. The human services provided by nonprofits are that link to get what they need so that we all can have a safe, healthy, and

prosperous state with communities that support one another. The spending cap has limited our ability to put wise, forward-looking measures in place for what our communities need now and, in the future.

There's money in the rainy-day fund. I'm still on the frontline, and I can tell you that it is raining! Families have been broken; people have lost loved ones vital to their support. Families have been evicted for increases in housing costs with nowhere to go. People who were stable with mental health supports also need peer respite services to avoid expensive hospitalizations in times of trial.

We need increases to DMHAS to be included in the governor's budget, and are asking for additional funding of at least 9% next year and 7% in 2025 to maintain the services available for all our people living with developmental, substance abuse and mental Health disorders which have increased since the pandemic.

In the words of Desmond Tutu: "We shouldn't ask people how you are doing, we should ask instead, 'How are we doing?' "

Connecticut citizens and workers deserve better from our leaders. You can't pay someone to care, but you can vote for those who do.

Thank you for reading my testimony.

Dyana Hagen